Listing of Claims:

1.   (previously presented)   A feature rights management system, comprising:

a feature rights server having a repository for storing feature keys, the feature keys representing activation rights for features including feature units;

a chassis comprising a plurality of card slots and a common backplane bus for connecting cards among the slots to one another;

a system manager card operatively disposed in a slot of a chassis, the system manager card comprising a feature rights management agent operatively coupled to the feature rights server to receive feature keys from the feature rights server, to store feature rights in a repository, and to identify available feature units provided; and

a plurality of application cards operatively disposed in a plurality of slots of at least one chassis, each application card operatively coupled to the system manager card over the common backplane bus to request feature rights from the feature rights management agent, wherein the feature rights management agent allocates the feature units among requesting plurality of application cards over the common backplane bus.

2.   (previously presented)   A feature rights management system according to claim 1,

wherein the feature rights management agents and the feature rights server transfer rights between the feature rights management agents and the server in the form of keys;

wherein the application cards and the feature rights management agent transfer rights between the application cards and the feature rights management agent in the form of permissions;

wherein a connection between the feature rights management agents and the feature rights server is un-trusted; and

wherein a connection between the sub-agents and the feature rights management agent is trusted.

3.   (cancelled)

4.   (cancelled)

5.   (cancelled)

6.   (cancelled)

7.   (currently amended)   A feature rights management system according to claim ~~3~~2, wherein the feature management agent releases feature keys from a feature rights management agent and moves feature rights keys to the feature rights server.

8.   (cancelled)

9.   (currently amended)   A feature rights management system according to claim ~~9~~1, wherein each feature unit designates how many instances of a feature category is permitted within a domain of a distribution node identified by the distribution node identifier.

10.   (currently amended)   A feature rights management system according to claim ~~8~~1, wherein the feature keys are of at least two kinds of keys: network keys destined to the feature rights server and element keys destined for the feature rights management agent.

11.   (cancelled)

12.   (cancelled)

13.   (cancelled)

14.   (cancelled)

15.   (cancelled)

16.   (cancelled)

17.   (cancelled)

18.   (cancelled)

19.   (previously presented)   A feature rights management apparatus capable of managing feature keys, the feature keys representing activation rights for features including feature units, comprising:

a chassis comprising a plurality of card slots and a common backplane bus for connecting cards among the slots to one another;

a system manager card operatively disposed in a slot of a chassis, the system manager card comprising a feature rights management agent for receiving feature keys from a feature rights source, to store feature rights in a repository, and to identify available feature units provided; and

a plurality of application cards operatively disposed in a plurality of slots of at least one chassis, each application card operatively coupled to the system manager card over the common backplane bus to request feature rights from the feature rights management agent, wherein the feature rights management agent allocates the feature units among requesting plurality of application cards over the common backplane bus.

20.   (previously presented)   A feature rights management apparatus according to claim 19,

wherein the feature rights management agent and the feature rights source transfer rights between themselves in the form of keys; and

wherein the application cards and the feature rights management agent transfer rights between themselves in the form of permissions.

21.   (previously presented)   A feature rights management apparatus according to claim 20,

wherein a connection between the feature rights management agent and the feature rights source is un-trusted; and

wherein a connection between the application cards and the feature rights management agent is trusted.

22.   (previously presented)   A feature rights management apparatus according to claim 20, wherein the application card requests permissions for feature rights from the feature rights management agent upon provisioning.

23.   (previously presented)   A feature rights management system according to claim 22,

wherein the feature rights management agent comprises a memory for storing a number of unallocated feature units; and

wherein the feature rights management agent requests keys for features from the feature rights source when the number of unallocated feature units is deficient to meet the needs of a request for permissions by a application card.

24.   (previously presented)   A feature rights management apparatus according to claim 20,

wherein the application card releases a feature unit by sending a release message to the feature rights management agent; and

wherein the feature rights management agent increases its number of available feature units in response to the release message.

25.   (previously presented)A feature rights management apparatus according to claim 20, wherein the feature management agent releases feature keys from a feature rights management agent and moves feature rights keys to the feature rights source.

26.   (original)   A feature rights management apparatus according to claim 19, wherein each feature key comprises a plurality of feature rights including a) feature units, b) a feature category, and c) a distribution node identifier.

27.   (original)   A feature rights management apparatus according to claim 26, wherein each feature unit designates how many instances of a feature category is permitted within a domain of a distribution node identified by the distribution node identifier.

28.   (previously presented)   A feature rights management apparatus according to claim 26,

wherein the feature keys are of at least two kinds of keys: network keys destined to the feature rights source and element keys destined for the feature rights management agent;

wherein, the distribution node identifier of an element key identifies a domain of an identified feature rights management agent, and

wherein the distribution node identifier of a network key identifies a domain of an identified feature management source.

29.   (cancelled)

30.   (currently amended)   A feature rights management system according to claim 8̶1̲, wherein the features comprise telecommunication features.

31.   (previously presented)   A feature rights management system according to claim 1, wherein the common backplane bus of the chassis is a trusted bus.

32.　(previously presented)　　A feature rights management system according to claim 1, wherein the common backplane bus of the chassis connects the plurality of application cards to the system manager card over a trusted intra-card bus.

33.　(previously presented)　　A feature rights management system according to claim 1, wherein the features comprise telecommunication features.

34.　(previously presented)　　A feature rights management system according to claim 1, wherein the features comprise prepaid billing.

35.　(previously presented)　　A feature rights management apparatus according to claim 19, wherein the common backplane bus of the chassis is a trusted bus.

36.　(previously presented)　　A feature rights management apparatus according to claim 19, wherein the common backplane bus of the chassis connects the plurality of application cards to the system manager card over a trusted intra-card bus.

37.　(previously presented)　　A feature rights management apparatus according to claim 19, wherein the features comprise telecommunication features.

38.　(previously presented)　　A feature rights management apparatus according to claim 19, wherein the features comprise prepaid billing.

39.　(previously presented)　　A feature rights management apparatus according to claim 19,

wherein the feature units designate a number of the application cards that are permitted to use a feature; and

wherein the feature rights management agent allocates the feature to application cards.

40.   (previously presented)   A feature rights management apparatus according to claim 39, wherein the feature allocated is a prepaid billing feature in a telecommunications system implemented on application cards in the chassis.

41.   (previously presented)   A feature rights management apparatus according to claim 19,

wherein the feature units designate a maximum use for a feature; and

wherein the feature rights management agent re-allocates the feature rights among application cards when application cars are removed and replaced in the chassis.

42.   (previously presented)   A feature rights management apparatus according to claim 19,

wherein the feature units designate a maximum number of simultaneous telephone calls that are permitted to use a given feature; and

wherein the feature rights management agent allocates the maximum number of simultaneous telephone calls that are permitted to use a given feature to application cards.

43.   (previously presented)   A feature rights management apparatus according to claim 19,

wherein the feature keys further include a destination ID; and

wherein the feature rights management agent confirms that the destination ID matches a serial number of the hardware of the feature rights management apparatus.